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The Beginning of the End

Chapter One 0-1 (Test)

The crowd was noisy, but Renji stood among them as if he were behind a thick pane of glass.Voices passed by laughter, fragments of conversations, other people's emotions, none of which had anything to do with him. He stood there, eyes downcast, fingers clenched so tightly that his nails bit into his skin. Pain was necessary it proved he was still here.Why me?He hadn't asked this question for the first time. And he wouldn't ask it for the last.The schoolyard pulsed with its usual life. Some talked about the test, some whispered rumors, some were playing a new game. Around Renji, the space seemed distorted: glances lingered a little too long, whispers softened, then sharpened again. He felt it on his skin.

Hey, isn't that him? Seriously? He's here again?He didn't turn around. He already knew what he'd see.Renji wasn't a victim because he was weak.He was a victim because he didn't resist.He didn't scream.He didn't complain.He didn't look them in the eye.When they shoved him he stepped back.When they laughed he stayed silent.When they humiliated him he remembered.That's what pissed them off the most.

Images he could never erase flickered through his mind: the dirty floor in the locker room, shoe marks on his uniform, the metallic taste of blood in his mouth. Every time, he told himself it would be the last. Every time, he was wrong.

Renji.The voice sounded too close.He slowly lifted his head. Familiar faces stood before himsmiles identical, eyes empty. The circle around him tightened as if the world had decided, for a moment, to cease existing beyond its boundaries.But Renji wasn't thinking about them.He was thinking about something else.That day.That thought that had taken root in his mind and would never leave.That if the pain wouldn't stop... maybe it was time to redirect it.The corner of his lips twitched into a barely noticeable shadow of a smile.They didn't notice.Too bad.

And so the day passed. Renji, entering the school toilet, saw a crowd of bullies. They were clearly unhappy and were whispering something to themselves about Renji's strange steps, his behavior, and insulting him in every possible way.

At the corner, right next to the toilet stall, he was met by a guy with a beard, and as if the man at school was not a student, not by his appearance, not by his clothes, and his height and weight exceeded his dimensions.

-(Renji) Huh? Who is this here? Who are you?

-(Man) Renji, they told me you haven't been hit on the head in a long time, especially from Kaoru, so she sent me so that you don't relax here, otherwise, look, you've become too free, you have to obey the school system.

-(Renji) Next time I can overcome the barrier and take revenge, I swear on all that is holy I will destroy.

The man swung his leg, testing Renji's reaction. Renji flinched in fear just from the swing of his leg. Was he scared by such a trifle? The man just chuckled and didn't touch the boy, grinning at his pitiful appearance. So Renji left the school toilet in frustration and went as far away from that place as possible to breathe a sigh of relief that he finally didn't get beat up.

DISCLAIMER / 21+ WARNING

This work is a piece of extreme dark fiction / psychological horror / guro and contains scenes of ultra-violent brutality, extreme cruelty, psychological sadism, graphic gore (dismemberment, torture, blood, mutilation), sexual violence (including attempted rape and references to rape), necrophilia, bullying, self-destruction and other extremely heavy and morally repulsive themes.The text does not contain calls to commit real crimes, does not glorify real-life violence and is intended exclusively for an adult audience capable of critically perceiving fictional content.If you have triggers related to violence, sexual violence, necrophilia, animal cruelty, suicide or any other psychological trauma we strongly recommend NOT reading this story.

Chapter One 1 (Talk)

Renji walked home slowly, as if the asphalt itself resisted every step.His school uniform still smelled like the restroom cheap soap, damp tiles, and something metallic that refused to fade. He wasn't injured. Not really. But his body remembered everything. The shove. His back hitting the wall. The man's hoarse voice far too old to belong anywhere near a school. He didn't look back.

Even now - he didn't.

The ringing in his ears wasn't from the impact.

It was from the words.

"Know your place."

Renji clenched his fists inside his jacket pockets. His nails dug into his skin. He didn't allow himself to exhale-exhaling would mean weakness, and today, weakness was unacceptable.

His house appeared sooner than he expected.

The light in the window was on.

Akio was already home.

For some reason, that irritated him.

He took off his shoes quietly, almost silently, but one floorboard still betrayed him with a sharp creak. A moment later, a voice came from the kitchen:

"You're late."

Calm. Even.

Too calm.

"I stayed after school," Renji replied without lifting his head.He hung his jacket on the hook, but it slipped and fell to the floor. Renji didn't pick it up right away. He just stared at it as if it weren't a piece of clothing, but something alive that he had dropped.Akio stepped out of the kitchen, drying his hands with a towel. His older brother looked like he'd had a normal day: clean shirt, composed expression, not a hint of fatigue. That only made things worse.

"Did you get into another fight?" Akio asked.

It wasn't really a question.

Akio never asked without already knowing.

"No."

Short. Final.

Akio studied him more closely. His gaze was always like that as if he could see not the person, but the cracks inside them.

"Your shoulder's tense."

"I'm just tired."

"Renji."

The name landed heavily. Like an anchor.

Renji walked past him into his room and dropped his bag on the floor. The chair scraped against the desk with a dull thud. He sat on the bed, elbows resting on his knees.

"Everything's fine at school," he said, staring at the floor.

Silence stretched.

Akio entered the room and leaned against the wall, not coming any closer. He always did that left space. Somehow, that was worse than pressure.

"In the school restroom?" Akio said calmly.

Renji snapped his head up.

"Are you following me?"

"No."

A pause.

"But you're bad at lying."

Renji let out a crooked smirk.

"Guess I'm a bad student."

"I didn't fall, if that's what you mean."

Akio exhaled.

"Renji..."

"I handled it," Renji snapped. "I always do."

"One day you won't."

Silence filled the room again.

Renji stood up.

"If you're done, I want to be alone."Akio stood as well."You don't have to carry this alone."Renji stopped by the window. Outside, the evening looked ordinary. "I know," he said quietly. "But I still will."Akio looked at his back."Then at least remember this," he said. "If you decide to answer... do it consciously. Not out of anger."Renji didn't reply.He stared at his reflection in the glass and thought that anger was the only thing keeping him upright.

"Guess you're my brother."

The words hit harder than the man had.

Renji looked away.

"It was an adult," he said finally. "Not a teacher. Someone... else."

"What was he doing at school?"

"Talking."

"What did he say?"

Renji fell silent. Something inside him tightened again. He felt something dark rising, anger, shame, the urge to punch the wall.

"It doesn't matter."

Akio stepped closer and sat down across from him so their eyes were level.

"If you say 'it doesn't matter' one more time," Akio said quietly, "I'll go there myself."

Renji froze.

"Don't."

"Then talk."

A long pause.

Seconds dragged on.

"He said I think too highly of myself," Renji finally muttered. "That people like me should know their place."

Akio didn't respond right away. His face stayed calm, but his jaw tightened.

"And what did you do?"

"Nothing."

"You're lying."

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Chapter One 1 (Memories)

Renji sat on the floor, his back against the cold wall. The lights in the room were off only a dim glow from the street slowly crawled across the ceiling, as if hesitant to descend. He stared into space, but it wasn't her he saw.
The smell of damp.
Sharp, sour.
A school restroom.
He winced, as if the memory were a physical blow.
That man had appeared suddenly. Not a student that was immediately clear. His steps were too heavy, his gaze too calm. Renji had been washing his hands, the water running too loudly, as if deliberately trying to drown out the tension that hung in the air.
"Hey," his voice was low. "You."
Renji didn't answer. He turned off the water, slowly wiped his hands on his pants, and looked up. The mirror reflected them both: a teenager with tired eyes and an adult man standing too close, too confident. "Do you know what happens to those who meddle too much in things that aren't their business?" he asked, tilting his head slightly.
Renji felt something twitch inside. Not fear—anger. That familiar anger, sticky like blood on his knuckles. He clenched his fists before he even realized what he was doing.
"Get away," he said quietly.
The man chuckled. One step forward.
And then everything went blurry. The rush of blood in his ears, the shortness of his breath, the thought if I don't strike now, I'll lose. His shoulder jerked, his body ready to lunge forward
"RENJI!"
Akio's voice hit harder than any fist.
He stood in the doorway, out of breath, with that expression on his face that Renji hated most: not anger, not fear weary disappointment.
"Are you picking a fight again?" Akio said. Calm. Too calm.
Renji froze. His fists were still clenched, but his body had become unresponsive. The man muttered something, retreated, and vanished as suddenly as he had appeared. All that remained was the smell and the disgusting feeling, as if you had just been tested and you don't know if you passed.
Akio came closer.
"Do you understand how this could end?" he asked quietly. "You're not a father."
That phrase hit him the hardest.
Renji closed his eyes.
Father.
The image of the bars, the dim light of the cell, the heavy gaze through the glass flashed through his mind. The last conversation. A voice that no longer held any strength only regret and something akin to shame.
"Don't repeat my mistakes," his father had said then.
But Renji still couldn't figure out what exactly.
He exhaled slowly and stared into the darkness of his room. The past wouldn't let go. It didn't scream it simply sat nearby, like a shadow, a reminder: blood runs in the family.

Renji ran his hand over his face. His hands trembled not from fear, but from the fact that he was once again on the brink. And next time, Akio might not make it in time.
"I don't want to be like him..." Renji whispered into the void.
But the void, as always, didn't answer.

Chapter Two 2 (The Meeting)

Renji stepped outside and quietly closed the door behind him. Not because he was afraid of waking anyone up he simply didn't want the sound to be loud. Loud things felt wrong today.
"Hey."
Renji stopped and turned around.

Akio was standing in the hallway, leaning against the wall as if he had been waiting for this exact moment. There was no anger in his eyes only tired concern, the kind you don't bother hiding anymore.
"Where are you going?" Akio asked.
"Just for a walk," Renji replied shortly.
Akio nodded, but didn't look away.
"After school… you seemed different."
"I'm always 'different,'" Renji tried to joke, but the words fell flat. A pause settled between them. The kind of pause where heavy things usually surface.
"In the bathroom…" Akio began, then stopped. "Are you sure it's over?"
Renji looked away.
"Whether it's over or not doesn't matter. It already happened."
Akio pressed his lips together.
"I don't want you carrying everything alone. A fight isn't nothing."
"I didn't lose," Renji said sharply.
Akio raised an eyebrow, surprised, but said nothing. He only nodded, as if storing that fact away.
"Alright. Go. But if anything happens you know where to find me."
Renji nodded and walked past him. In his room, he quickly changed into a simple dark tank top. The fabric felt cool and familiar. His reflection flashed in the mirror tall, tense, like his body was always bracing for impact, even in silence.
He turned away and left.
The street greeted him with its usual noise. Cars, voices, footsteps - everything blended into one constant motion. Renji walked slowly, with no real destination. He just needed to move.
His thoughts tangled.
I should've…
No, not like that…
If only I had…
He suddenly stopped.
"Condensed milk."
The word slipped out of his mouth, almost ridiculous. He remembered the store, the shelves, the blue cans. And how he had walked out without buying anything.
"Great…" he muttered.
He didn't want to turn back. Home felt too close, too tight. Just as he decided to keep walking, he heard it.
Noise ahead.
Not casual chatter.
A crowd.
Renji lifted his head.
At the intersection, people had gathered. A lot of them. Phones were raised, voices overlapped, excitement buzzed in the air. The kind of tension that comes before something important happens.
Renji moved closer.
"What's going on?" someone asked.
"You seriously don't know?" another voice replied. "It's her."

"Who?"
"Miyuki Hasegawa."
The name rolled through the crowd like a spark.
"A female fighter," a guy said, clearly enjoying the attention. "Leader of the fighting club F."
"A girl?" someone scoffed. "You're kidding."
"Won't be funny if you face her," someone shot back. "They say she dropped a guy twice her size."
"And get this," a girl added, "she was raised in a Christian family. Proper upbringing, all that."
"Yeah, and then she comes out here and fights," someone laughed. "Crazy contrast."
Renji stayed silent, listening. His heart was beating faster than usual, and he didn't know why.
The crowd shifted.
He saw her.
Miyuki stood calmly, almost motionless. Tall. Confident. Long dark hair tied into two buns casual, but unmistakably her style. She wasn't challenging the crowd or seeking approval.
She simply didn't care.
So that's her… Renji thought.
There was a strange quiet around her. People talked, laughed, whispered but none dared step too close.
"If anyone has something to say," Miyuki spoke evenly, "say it now."
Her voice wasn't loud.
But everyone heard it.
No one answered.
Renji stood off to the side, unable to look away. Fragments of memories surfaced mocking voices, cramped space, the school bathroom.
She isn't afraid.
Or maybe she just doesn't show it.
Miyuki turned her head slightly. Their eyes met.
No anger.
No curiosity.
Just a brief, measuring glance. Then she looked away. But in that moment, Renji felt something shift inside him. He didn't know what it meant yet. Only that after this street, things would never be the same.

Chapter Three 3 (Train)

Night.
The only light in the room came from the monitor.
Renji sat at his desk, slightly hunched forward, headphones on. The screen flashed with colors, skill effects, and fast movements. His fingers pressed the keys automatically, without thought.
He had been playing for a long time. Too long.
Outside the window, the city was quiet. That kind of quiet that felt heavier than noise. A car passed somewhere in the distance, the sound fading almost immediately.
Renji's eyes stayed on the screen, but his thoughts didn't.
The street came back to him.
The crowd.
Miyuki.
That brief look something about it had shifted inside him, like he had seen the world from a different angle.
If things were as simple as a game…
You lose, you restart. You win, and it's over.
His character collapsed on the screen.
"…damn," Renji muttered.
He took off his headphones and leaned back in his chair. The room became painfully quiet again. The clock on the wall showed well past midnight.
Renji closed his eyes.
And somewhere else in the city.
The alley was crowded.
Girls and guys moved forward in a dense flow, as if drawn toward the same place. Conversations overlapped, laughter sounded a little too loud, like people were trying to hide their tension.
At the end of the alley stood a door.
It was open.
Beyond it was an empty space. An old market. Bare concrete floor, exposed walls, a faint smell of dampness. A place stripped of everything unnecessary.
A boy stepped out of the doorway.
He stopped at the entrance and calmly looked over the crowd. His presence alone changed the mood the noise softened, movements slowed.
From the center of the crowd, another boy stepped forward and faced him.
"Who sent you?" he asked.
The boy at the door didn't look away.
"And what's your name?" came next.
A brief pause.
"Shinya," he said. "Shinya Kyoto."
Low voices rippled through the crowd.
"Did you come here for no reason?" the boy in the center asked.
Shinya took a step forward.
"No," he said. "I didn't come here for nothing."

There was no aggression in his voice.
But there was no hesitation either.
Fukuoka.
The station was alive with noise. People rushed past, talked, laughed, argued. Announcements echoed one after another. Suitcases rolled endlessly across the floor.
On the platform stood a boy with white hair.
He was fifteen years old. A suitcase rested in his hand. He stood slightly apart from everyone else, as if he had arrived too early or too late.
His gaze was lowered.
A train pulled into the metro platform. The sound of metal spread through the station, and the crowd suddenly moved faster, as if pushed by something invisible.
Then it began to rain.
At first, softly. Then harder. Drops struck the roof, ran along the edges of the platform. The floor grew wet, reflecting the station lights and distorting the shapes of people.
The boy didn't move.
People brushed past his shoulder, but he didn't react. The suitcase remained beside him, heavy, as if it carried more than just belongings.
The train doors opened.
Slowly, he raised his head.
Noise, light, and rain blended together, creating the feeling of standing between what had already ended and what was about to begin.
The train waited.

Chapter Three 3 (Arrival)

The train gave a soft shudder and came to a stop. The doors hissed open, releasing the smell of metal, hot asphalt, and other people's lives.
Genzo stepped onto the platform of Tokyo Station and immediately felt the city crash down on him with its full weight. There was none of the calm hum of provincial stations here this was a roar, a pulse, an endless stream of people moving as if they already knew exactly where they needed to go, and no one was about to yield to some kid from Osaka.
He adjusted the strap of his backpack, which suddenly felt heavy, as though it didn't contain just clothes and textbooks, but something far more dangerous. Fifteen years old the age when you still believe you can disappear into a crowd if you really want to. Genzō really wanted to.
Above his head, huge displays glowed. Announcements in Japanese and English blended into white noise:
"Yamano-te Line train, platform 14… Ginza Line subway transfer… Please mind the closing doors…"
He moved toward the escalators leading down into the subway depths. The crowd carried him like a river don't resist, or you'll drown. Someone slammed hard into his shoulder; Genzō nearly lost his balance but caught himself. He turned around the man in the dark coat had already vanished into the flow. Only a black back and the scent of expensive cologne mixed with something metallic lingered for a second.
Genzō shook his head. Paranoia after a long trip, nothing more.
He descended to the Yamano-te Line level. It was even more crowded, even louder. Advertising screens flashed bright commercials: girls in school uniforms smiled too widely, new iPhones gleamed in someone's hands, a voice promised "the perfect life with one click."
Genzō pulled out his phone and opened the map. Shibuya was just a few stops away. His mom had texted that morning: "Can't meet you, Dad's stuck at work. You'll manage on your own you're old enough." He'd only snorted back then. Old enough. Sure.
He stood behind the yellow line, waiting for the train. In the reflection of the carriage window he saw his own face pale, with dark circles under his eyes from a sleepless night on the train. Hair sticking out in every direction, school shirt collar crumpled. Just an ordinary guy. No one would ever guess that…
…that under the textbooks and spare clothes in his backpack lay a small folding knife. The one his father had given him "just in case" when they went hiking in the mountains. Genzō had laughed back then. Not funny anymore.
The train arrived. Doors opened. Genzō stepped inside and pressed his back against the handrail. The carriage was packed schoolkids, office workers, tourists with huge suitcases. The smell of sweat, perfume, convenience-store bento.
He stared into the tunnel window black glass reflecting only lights and faces. Sometimes it seemed like someone familiar flickered among those reflections. Someone he'd never met, but whose face somehow felt important.
At Yurakucho station a man entered the carriage. Tall, thin, wearing a long black coat despite the heat. Face hidden behind a mask and the brim of a cap. He stood directly opposite Genzō too close for such a crush. Genzō tensed but pretended to look at his phone.
The man spoke quietly, almost a whisper:

"You're Takeda, right?"
Genzō flinched. Raised his eyes. The man was looking straight at him dark eyes, calm like still water in an old well.
"How do you"
"Doesn't matter," the man leaned in slightly. "Just answer one thing. Have you ever heard the name… Asakawa?"
Genzō felt a cold shiver run down his spine. That name. He had heard it. Once. Long ago. In his parents' nighttime conversation when they thought he was asleep. A word spoken in whispers, as if saying it aloud could make it real.
"No," Genzō lied on reflex.
The man smiled under the mask the corners of his eyes crinkled.
"You're a bad liar. But that's okay. You'll have plenty of time to learn."
The train jerked, doors opened at the next station. The man turned and stepped out without looking back. Genzō stayed where he was, gripping the handrail so hard his knuckles turned white.
He didn't know who that was.
He didn't know why that name triggered such a strange echo in his chest a mix of fear and something almost like… thirst.
But one thing he knew for certain:
Tokyo had just swallowed him.
And it had no intention of spitting him back out.
To be continued…

Chapter Fourth 4 (Accusations)

Renji left school last. The courtyard was almost empty only a few stragglers hurrying toward the gates, someone laughing loudly, someone talking on the phone. He walked slowly, not looking back. His school bag hung heavily on one shoulder, the strap cutting into his skin through the thin fabric of his shirt. Every step echoed in his chest not pain, just a dull weight, as if something inside had shifted and was now rattling loose.

The house stood not in a forest of high-rises, but in a quiet residential neighborhood low two- or three-story buildings surrounded by old trees. Narrow paths ran between them, overgrown with grass and small bushes. In summer it smelled of leaves and damp earth, even in Tokyo. Now autumn was creeping in the leaves were turning yellow, wind rustling them underfoot. Renji followed the familiar path past the bench where he once sat with Aya after classes. The bench was empty now, covered in fallen leaves.

He climbed to the second floor the wooden stairs creaked on every step. The key turned in the lock easily, familiarly. The door opened with a soft sigh.

In the entryway he took off his bag and hung it on the hook by the door. He peeled off his jacket slowly, folded it onto the shelf. Changed into an old gray T-shirt and worn sweatpants the fabric soft, familiar, smelling of laundry detergent and home. He stood for a second, looking at his sneakers by the threshold dirty from the school yard. Didn't clean them. Just walked on.

The living room was small, cozy in its own way: an old sofa by the window, a low table with a vase of dried flowers, a TV on a stand that was rarely turned on. Mom sat on the sofa knees pressed together, one palm pressed tightly to her face. Her shoulders trembled faintly. Not loud sobs quiet, suppressed hiccups, as if she were trying to hide them even from herself.

Renji stopped in the doorway.

"Mom…"

She didn't answer right away. Only pressed her palm harder against her cheek, fingers going white.

"They… they came," she finally whispered, voice cracked like old glass. "Said they found evidence. Old evidence. Very old. I don't know how… how this is happening now…"

Renji felt the air thicken. He knew. Not everything, but enough. He had known since he started noticing how Dad sometimes stayed silent too long, how Mom flushed at random neighbor questions. But hearing it out loud was different. As if the words had made it real.

Outside the window came a sound first distant sirens, then closer, more insistent. Mom flinched, but didn't move her hand.

The door opened without knocking. Two uniformed officers, a third in plain clothes tall, tired eyes. One of them nodded to Mom short, almost apologetic.

"Mrs. Asakawa. We need to take your husband. Please don't make this difficult."

Dad came out of the kitchen. Hands already cuffed behind his back. Face calm, almost detached. Only his eyes empty, as if he were already somewhere else. He walked past Renji without stopping. One brief glance no words, no emotion. Just a fact: here he is, here they are.

The officers led him out. The door closed quietly, without a slam. The sirens faded downstairs, then disappeared completely.

Renji walked to the window. Pulled the thin curtain aside. Watched as they put Dad in the back of the patrol car. Dad's head was slightly bowed. The car pulled away slowly, no siren now. It drove down the narrow street, disappeared around the bend where the trees began.
Renji stood at the window for a long time. Stared at the empty street. Leaves swirled in the air, fell onto the asphalt. Mom was still sitting on the sofa, palm over her face. Her shoulders trembled more quietly now, but didn't stop.
He didn't go to her. Didn't know what to say. Just stood and watched as the day slowly darkened outside.
Meanwhile, in the small Shibuya apartment, Genzō lay on the sofa, staring at the ceiling. The silence no longer felt so oppressive he was getting used to it. His phone rested on his chest, screen glowing. He opened the browser and scrolled through school listings Mom had said last night: "Choose whichever you want. Just make sure it's not too far I don't want you spending an hour commuting every day."
He scrolled lazily. Most schools looked the same: standard photos of buildings, lists of clubs, parent reviews like "good teachers," "lots of homework," "convenient location." Nothing special. Then he came across one.
"School 235."
Simple name, no frills. Photo a plain three-story gray building, sports field with a running track, a few students in uniform by the gate. In the background streets he recognized from yesterday. The intersection, the convenience store on the corner, trees along the sidewalk. Close. Very close fifteen minutes on foot, no more.
Genzō zoomed in on the photo. Looked at the building more carefully. Ordinary school. Nothing scary, nothing remarkable. Just a place where you could study and blend in.
He rolled onto his stomach, opened the chat with Mom.
"Mom, found a school. 235. Looks okay. Really close, I can walk."
The reply came quickly, Mom must have been online.
"Good job, sweetie. We'll go submit the documents tomorrow morning. I'll take the morning off. You did well looking it up yourself. Don't worry, everything will be fine."
Genzō set the phone down beside the pillow. Looked back at the ceiling. The crack in the corner seemed a little longer than yesterday or maybe it was just the light. He closed his eyes.
Thoughts drifted slowly.
Tomorrow - new school.
New faces.
New voices.
Maybe it would be easier there.
Maybe not.

Chapter Four 4 (Childhood)

Genzō pushed the apartment door open with his shoulder the lock screeched like it hadn't been oiled in a decade. The door gave way with reluctant resistance, and immediately the smell hit him: fresh paint mixed with old dust from the carpet and something faintly metallic, as if no one had truly lived here for a long time. The narrow genkan barely fit two pairs of shoes; beyond it, a tiny kitchen-living room where the table pressed right against the sofa, and the TV hung on the wall like the only witness to normal life. Parents' bedroom door on the left. His cornerbehind a thin sliding screen on the right. The balcony was just a windowsill with railings, facing the blank wall of the neighboring building half a meter away. No sky, no street, no air. Just gray concrete staring back.

He kicked off his sneakers without untying the laces; they thudded dully to the floor. The backpack followed, landing against the wall with a soft rustle. Silence descended instantly thick, sticky, as though the apartment had been waiting for him to enter so it could finally shut up completely. Only the refrigerator in the corner hummed low and steady, and far outside, muffled car engines and occasional traffic-light beeps filtered through.

Genzō padded barefoot to the kitchen the floor cold, linoleum slightly tacky from recent cleaning. He opened the lower cabinet: Mom had already arranged everything neatly. Instant

ramen packets stood in a row like soldiers, rice in a clear bag, a can of tuna, and two large bags of chips—one salt & vinegar, the other wasabi & nori. He grabbed the wasabi one. Tore the package open with his teeth the foil crinkled loudly, echoing off the bare walls. The sharp, stinging smell hit his nostrils, almost burning.

He dropped onto the old sofa brought from Osaka sagging in the middle where Dad always sat. The fabric still carried the faint scent of their old home, the one that now belonged to the past. He picked up the remote from the armrest and turned on the TV. The screen flickered, then lit up. An old black-and-white movie was playing: yakuza in long coats, rain streaking the asphalt, betrayal in a half-dark alley. The actors' voices were muted, subtitles crawling slowly across the bottom. Genzō didn't try to follow the plot. He just needed background noise dialogue, music, footsteps on screen. Anything to keep the silence from swallowing him whole.

He leaned back, stretched his legs onto the low coffee table. Opened the chip bag wider, scooped out a handful. Crunch loud, rhythmic. One after another. The wasabi burned his tongue, made his eyes water slightly, but it felt good something real in all this emptiness. Thoughts drifted in slowly, without hurry, like drips from a leaky faucet.

Mom texted this morning: "Interview at three, back around eight or nine. Eat properly, don't live on chips."

He replied: "Ok."

Dad hadn't appeared in the chat since the day before yesterday. Probably buried at work again new position, new people, new rules.

Tomorrow he should go out, find the nearest convenience store. Buy soda, maybe a bento for dinner. Or just sit there, watch people.

School in three days. Uniform already bought, but he hadn't tried it on here yet. Different collar, different feel. Wonder if the kids will be the same as back in Osaka the ones who spot weakness instantly and poke at it. Or maybe Tokyo is different. Maybe here he can at least disappear into the crowd.

He finished the handful, reached for more. Crunch, crunch, crunch. On screen the protagonist stood under rain, smoking, staring into nothing. Genzō watched him and wondered: did he ever have a day when he just walked into a new place and realized no one was coming home on time?

He had no idea that at that very moment, in another part of Tokyo, in an ordinary public middle school on the outskirts, three fifteen-year-olds were sitting in an empty classroom after the final bell. Windows open, but the air still felt heavy chalk dust, lingering sweat, old textbooks.

Renji sat by the window elbows on the desk, hands shoved in his jacket pockets, hair falling over his eyes, hiding the faded bruise under his left lid. He wasn't looking at anyone. Just staring at the scratched surface of the desk someone long ago had carved "fuck school" with a knife.

Two rows away, Takumi sprawled in his seat long legs stretched into the aisle, arms behind his head, a crooked, lazy smirk on his face. He looked down at Renji even though he was farther back. In his eyes: boredom mixed with quiet pleasure, as if he already knew how the day would end.

Aya sat closer to Renji nearer to him than to Takumi. Hands folded on the desk, back straight, gaze calm but tense like a taut string. She said nothing. She just didn't leave. That alone was resistance.

"So, Renji," Takumi drawled without changing position. "Silent treatment again? Tongue gone after yesterday? Or just scared to open your mouth?"
Renji didn't answer. His fingers clenched in his pocket until his nails dug into his palm.
Takumi snorted, pulled out his phone, scrolled aimlessly feed, stories, nothing worth seeing.
"Fine. Tomorrow after classes same as always. Don't be late, or I'll have to remind you another way."
Aya turned her head sharply.
"Enough, Takumi."
Her voice was quiet but sharp, like a blade edge.
Takumi raised his eyebrows; the smirk stretched wider, almost to his ears.
"Oh, Aya's awake. Sitting there like a statue otherwise. What, defending your little loser again?"
Aya didn't blink.
"I said enough."
Takumi shrugged, stood slowly, stretched until his joints popped.
"As you wish. See ya, losers."
He walked out, slamming the door a little harder than necessary. The sound echoed down the hallway.
Renji finally lifted his head. Looked at Aya briefly, wordlessly.
"Thanks."
She shook her head.
"No need. I'm just… tired of it all."
They fell silent. The classroom grew even quieter only the wind rustled the curtains at the open window.
Then, in Renji's mind, a memory flared up like an old film reel, scratched and flickering.
…They were six or seven. Elementary school, first or second grade.
At first it was almost easy. Renji and Takumi played together after classes running across the schoolyard, building forts from bento boxes, sharing candy from the vending machine. Takumi was always louder, inventing games, dragging Renji along. Renji liked it he was quiet, and Takumi made everything brighter.
Aya transferred in later. She approached during a long recess, small, short-haired, big eyes.
"Can I play with you?"
Takumi laughed.
"Sure! Now we're three!"
They played as a trio. Tag to the fence, chalk drawings on asphalt, hide-and-seek behind old trees. Simple. Fun.
Then Kaoru appeared.
She was four or five. Long dark hair in two braids, bright jacket, small hands always moving. Only child her mother worked nights. Kaoru sometimes waited on the street or came to pick her up after after-school care.
At first she just watched from a distance. Then she came closer. And started.
One day Takumi shoved Renji's shoulder—"joking"—and took his last candy. Renji stayed silent, eyes down.
Kaoru ran over fast, grabbed Takumi's sleeve with her tiny fingers.

"Give it back! He's a crybaby, but it's his candy! Make him give it, or I'll tell everyone he's a coward who can't even fight back!"
Her voice was high and childish, but already laced with poison not innocent anger, but something cold and mean. Takumi laughed, but looked at her with new interest. He gave the candy back. Something in his eyes shifted.
From then on Kaoru came more often. Not to play.
She taunted Renji first poking his back when no one was looking, whispering:
"Crybaby. Coward. Too scared to even talk back."
Laughed loudest when Takumi took his pocket money "for now."
Egged him on: "Go on, take more! He'll give it anyway he's weak."
Takumi brushed it off at first, then started playing along.
"Kaoru's right—he's a loser. Why does he even need money?"
Aya tried to step in:
"Stop it. This isn't funny."
Kaoru snorted, turned to her:
"What are you, his mom? Go home if you don't like it. Or do you want everyone laughing at you too?"
She hated Renji deeply, fiercely, for reasons no one understood, but the hatred burned like a slow fire inside her.
Hated Aya—for not staying quiet, for not being afraid.
Hated Takumi—for not being cruel enough, for not going all the way.
The smallest one among them, but already the one setting the tone.
She decided when it started.
She decided when it stopped.
The memory faded slowly, like a bulb burning out.
Renji dropped his gaze back to the desk.
Aya touched his sleeve lightly, barely there.
"Want to go home?"
He nodded short, silent.
They stood. Gathered their things. Walked out together. Footsteps echoed down the long, cold, endless hallway.
Back in the tiny Shibuya apartment, Genzō finished the last chips. Crumpled the empty bag into a ball, tossed it into the trash under the sink.
Turned off the TV the screen went black, reflecting his face for a second in the dark glass.
Lay down on the sofa, still dressed. Stared at the ceiling white, with a small crack in the corner.
Silence returned. Complete. Absolute.
He didn't know about Renji, Takumi, Aya, or the little girl with long dark braids who already hated them all back then and planted the seeds of the hell to come.
He just lay there.
Waiting for this stagnation to finally crack
and for something anything to begin.

Chapter Five 5 (New Life)

The small café on the corner of Shibuya-Harajuku was busy even on a weekday afternoon. Sunlight filtered through the large windows, catching on the metal edges of tables and the steam rising from coffee cups. At one of the tiniest tables by the window barely enough room for three sat Genzō's parents and a neighbor from their apartment building. She was in her late thirties, short neat hair, a soft smile that didn't quite reach her eyes.
Genzō's mother leaned forward slightly, cradling her latte in both hands.
"We went to submit the documents to 235 this morning. They said he can start next week. The principal seemed nice calm, not like some of the schools we've heard about."
The neighbor nodded, slowly stirring her iced tea with a spoon.
"Yes, good choice. Not too big, not chaotic. My daughter studied there for two years before we switched her to private. Teachers are strict but fair, and the location is perfect right in the middle of everything but still quiet. Your boy won't get lost in the crowd."
Genzō's father smiled a bit awkwardly, rubbing the back of his neck.
"We were worried about the commute at first, but it's really just fifteen minutes on foot. He'll handle it. He's pretty independent anyway."
The neighbor laughed softly.
"Fifteen minutes? That's nothing in Tokyo. And at his age… they grow up so fast. One day they're asking for help with homework, the next they're choosing schools themselves."
Genzō's mother glanced at her husband, then back at the neighbor.
"We're just glad he found something close. After the move… everything felt so heavy. But he's coping better than we expected."
They all smiled small, polite smiles, the kind people share when they want to believe things will turn out okay. The neighbor reached for her glass.
"You'll see. Kids adapt. And 235 has a decent reputation. Not elite, but solid. He'll make friends. Maybe even join a club."
Genzō's father nodded.
"Yeah… we hope so."
They sat in comfortable silence for a moment, watching people pass outside the window. The conversation drifted to lighter topics weather, new convenience stores in the area, rising rent prices. But underneath it all was a quiet relief: at least something was moving forward.
A few blocks away, in the quiet green corner of the residential neighborhood, Renji sat on the same old wooden bench under the big zelkova tree. Leaves rustled softly overhead in the breeze. He held a can of Coca-Cola in both hands cold, condensation dripping onto his fingers. He hadn't opened it yet. Just stared at the silver top, tracing the wet lines with his thumb.
The street was empty. Only an occasional bicycle passed, tires whispering on asphalt. The bench was the same one he used to sit on with Aya back when conversations were easy and didn't hurt. Now it felt too big for one person.
He thought about yesterday. About the empty spot at the kitchen table this morning. About how Mom hadn't said a word when he left. Just looked at him with red-rimmed eyes and nodded at his "I'm going out for a bit."
He finally cracked the can open. The hiss was loud in the quiet. Took a sip sweet, cold, familiar. But it didn't loosen the knot in his chest.

At the same time, several large blocks away, Kaoru stood alone on the empty courtyard of an old hospital. Long dark hair loose over her shoulders, school jacket unbuttoned, skirt slightly shorter than regulation. She stood in the middle of the asphalt expanse, surrounded by a low fence and sparse trees. No patients, no visitors only the wind chasing dry leaves across the concrete.
She stared somewhere into the distance, at the gray wall of the hospital building, and spoke quietly, almost to herself.
"People can be kind… in small things. Smile at a stranger, offer a hand, say a nice word. But kindness is just a pause. Short. As soon as something they really want appears everything changes. The mask falls. And what was always inside remains."
She slowly raised her hand and touched her chest lightly, fingers through the fabric of her blouse, as if checking whether her heart was still beating, or simply reminding herself that the body was still here.
"Evil doesn't pretend. It doesn't promise. It just does. And that's its honesty. People say: 'I'm not like that.' But everyone is. Some just haven't reached the edge yet. Others… have already stepped over."
She fell silent. The wind caught her hair, lifted it slightly. Kaoru stood motionless, gazing at the hospital wall as if the answer were written there. Or as if she were waiting for someone to come out of the doors.
No one came out.
She turned and walked away slowly, unhurried, disappearing around the corner of the building.
Renji was still sitting on his bench in the quiet neighborhood. He finished the Coca-Cola. The can was empty. He crushed it in his hand, felt the cold metal give under his fingers.
Somewhere far away Genzō was probably unpacking his school bag, thinking about next week. Renji didn't know that. He just sat and stared at the empty street, wondering how long the pause would last this time.

Chapter Five 5 (Orientation)

A new day had arrived, the sun had risen above the sky, it was 2 o'clock, everyone was walking after school. Haruto walked ahead of his group five guys, all with unbuttoned school jackets, backpacks dangling from one shoulder. They weren't a real gang in the full sense just friends who stuck together, smoked behind the school courtyard, and didn't bother anyone who didn't bother them. Peaceful, as Haruto liked to say. "We don't look for trouble," he repeated often, "trouble finds us on its own."
They were walking down the narrow alley behind the school the one that always smelled of cigarette smoke and fried takoyaki from the nearby stall. Haruto in the middle, hands in his pockets, lazy confident smile. He turned to the others, voice loud enough for everyone to hear.
"Yesterday, guys, I slept like the dead. Then woke up and… well, basically, there was this super hot chick. Long legs, cat eyes, and she started everything herself. I didn't even finish my coffee."
The guys laughed someone slapped him on the shoulder, someone whistled.
"Haruto, again?" Kenta snorted the tallest one. "Soon they'll put up a statue for you with stories like that."
Haruto just grinned wider and shrugged.
"What can I do if I'm irresistible."
They turned the corner and stopped. In the shadow of an old fence, against the wall, someone stood. White shirt, long purple hair falling past the shoulders, slender almost fragile figure. Standing with their back turned, but when Haruto's group got closer, the person slowly turned around.
One of the guys Ryu, the one who always joked the loudest elbowed Haruto.
"Hey, look, Haruto. Another one. You could definitely get to know that one. Purple hair that's the trend right now."
Haruto narrowed his eyes. The purple hair shimmered in the sunlight like it was dyed specifically for this light. He stepped forward, smile still in place.
"Hey, hi. You new here?"
The purple-haired person turned fully. Bright eyes, slightly mocking, lips curved in a light smile. Voice soft but confident.
"Not exactly new. And not exactly… a girl."
Haruto blinked. Once. Twice. Then smirked and extended his hand.
"Well then, hi, not-exactly-a-girl. I'm Haruto."
The guy looked at the outstretched hand for a second, then shook it palm warm, grip firm.
"Raiden."
Haruto laughed genuinely, without malice.
"Raiden, huh. Nice to meet you, femboy."
Raiden raised an eyebrow but smiled wider.
"You're direct. I like that."
The guys behind Haruto exchanged glances someone snickered, someone just shrugged. No one tensed up. Haruto clapped Raiden on the shoulder.
"Wanna come with us? We're not in a hurry anyway."
Raiden nodded.
"Why not."

They continued down the alley, laughter and chatter flowing again as if nothing unusual had happened.

Meanwhile, in the school courtyard, a teacher stood leaning against the gymnasium wall. Ms. Nakamura young, short black hair, tired eyes. Arms crossed over her chest, gaze drifting across the empty yard. Students had already gone to classes, the bell had rung long ago, but she wasn't in a rush to go inside.

She was thinking about what she had seen over the past months. About bruises that appeared on faces and vanished a few days later. About eyes that dropped to the floor when certain people walked by. About whispers in the hallways, about how some kids tried not to walk alone after classes.

She knew names. Knew who shoved whom in the shoulder "by accident." Knew who took money "just for now." Knew that this wasn't just childish pranks it was a system, small but harsh.

Ms. Nakamura sighed. Looked up at the sky gray, low, as if rain was coming.

"I have to do something," she thought. "But what? If I tell the principal they'll say I'm exaggerating. If I talk to parents they'll say their child 'isn't like that.' And the kids… the kids stay silent. Because they're afraid of becoming the next one."

She pushed off the wall, adjusted her bag on her shoulder.

"But I won't stay silent. Not today."

She turned and walked toward the main entrance. Her footsteps echoed across the empty courtyard.

To be continued…

Chapter Six 6 (Bullying)

The sun hung high, bright and merciless. The city lay exposed beneath it no clouds, no shade, only white light cutting into the eyes. A path outside the city wound between low houses where paint had peeled and weeds pushed through cracks in the asphalt. The air was hot, smelling of dust and heated metal. No wind, no relief just heat and light.
Renji walked slowly, hands in his pockets, eyes on the ground. The sun beat straight into his face, but he didn't squint.
"I used to have a cat. Jacques."
His voice was quiet, even, as if stating a simple fact.
"A small gray ball with a white spot on his chest. I loved him so much. Carried him in my arms, fed him from my hand, slept with him. He purred so loudly it vibrated through my whole body. I thought that's it, the real thing. As long as he's with me, everything will be fine."
He stopped by a puddle yesterday's rain had left it in the middle of the path. The water stood clear, reflecting the sky and the sun.
"Then one day… ten stray dogs. They just attacked. Right in front of my eyes. They tore him apart. Left nothing no fur, no blood, just dirt and shreds. I stood and watched. Didn't scream, didn't run. Just stood. The sun was shining bright, the sky blue, as if nothing had happened. And Jacques was gone."
Renji lifted his head. The sun blinded him.
"Since then I hate the sun. It's too honest. Shows everything as it is and you don't care."
He walked on. The path curved behind a house, and the memory stayed lying in the puddle, like a dead kitten.
On the street in the center noise, people, cars. Haruto's group walked ahead: Haruto in the middle, the others around him, steps lazy. Behind them walked a girl alone, eyes on the asphalt. Raiden stood against the wall, shoulder leaning, watching indifferently at the group, at the girl, at the street. No words, no movement.
They passed each other. No one said anything. No glance lingered. Just a flow people, light, heat. They passed and disappeared around the corner.
Kaoru stood by the hospital. The sun hit her back; there was no shadow only her and the wall behind. She looked at the dirty puddle at her feet. The water was black, oily, reflecting her face distorted, like in a broken mirror.
She spoke quietly, but every word fell heavily.
"So… your grandfather killed my mother."
She touched the reflection with her finger. Ripples spread across the water, the face blurred.
"Did you know? Or did you just pretend you didn't care?"
A memory flashed sharply.
…They were thirteen. School corridor after classes, almost empty. Kaoru walked past Renji slowly, deliberately. She stopped, looked into his eyes.
"One fine day you'll die."
Her voice was calm, almost gentle.
Renji smirked crooked, without malice.
"Maybe. But you'll miss my corpse."
She didn't reply. Just walked on. But something inside her broke forever.

The memory faded.
Kaoru stood up. The puddle remained behind dirty, still.
Deep in the city, in an underground hall where the light was only red and dim girls lay on the stone floor, bound, gagged. Takayama stood in the center, smile never leaving his face. He entered one of them slowly, deeply, as if performing a ritual. Another screamed into the gag, tears streaming down her face, body jerking. The third no longer resisted eyes empty, body limp.
The air was thick with sweat, blood, semen, and incense. Moans mixed with prayers. One of the robed figures whispered: "He gives us strength… he takes everything…"
Renji's father sat in his cell rusted bars, dim light. He dragged an old car by a rope heavy, covered in dirt. The guards shouted from above:
"Pull harder! Or die here!"
He pulled with all his strength muscles tearing, blood running down his palms. From above the police chief watched face stone, eyes empty. Just watched as the father strained, as if this was the most ordinary sight.
The darkness was thick, sticky. It oozed from the walls, from the eyes, from the air. There was no hope. No light. Only weight pressing on the chest until breathing became hard.

Chapter Six 6 (Provocation)

The sun rose slowly over the city. Morning was quiet, as if Tokyo hadn't fully woken up yet. Rays pierced through a thin layer of clouds, gilding the roofs of low houses, reflecting in the windows of high-rises, sliding across the leaves of trees in quiet neighborhoods. The air was fresh, carrying the light scent of damp earth and coffee from nearby convenience stores. Somewhere far off the first trains were already humming, but here in the residential streets silence still reigned only occasional cyclists and early joggers broke it.
Inside the kindergarten life was already in full swing. Children ran around the hall, laughing, building towers from blocks, shouting "you're it!" in tag. Sunlight poured through the large windows, making everything brighter, warmer, almost carefree. In the corner by the window, away from the main chaos, two high school students stood talking quietly, almost in whispers, so as not to attract the attention of the teachers.
There were two of them, Ria and Ken, standing in the kindergarten.
The girl leaned against the windowsill, watching the little ones race around.
"Is Takumi coming today?"
The boy shrugged, eyes still on the playing children.
"He said yes. Said he has 'plans.' As always."
The girl snorted, crossing her arms.
"Plans… He always says that. Then either he takes money from someone, or just starts bullying. Do you think he's planning something serious today?"
The boy turned his head toward her.
"Serious? You never know with him. Maybe just a bad mood. Maybe he spotted someone new and decided that's his 'target for the day.' Or maybe something big for real. With him it's always like that either boring or hell."
The girl sighed.
"As long as he doesn't touch us. I'm already tired of his 'jokes.'"
The boy smirked.
"We're all tired. But as long as he doesn't touch us we stay quiet. It's easier that way."
They fell silent. Only children's laughter and the patter of small feet across the floor filled the space between them. The sun climbed higher, and the shadows from the window frames slowly crept across the floor, as if time was stretching lazily, unhurried.
At the same time, in the headquarters three people stood. Sua was turning an old photograph in his hands. Takamura stood by the board covered with pinned faded newspaper clippings. Akira sat at the table, flipping through a folder.
Sua looked up.
"Takamura-san… have you ever heard of Takayama?"
Takamura froze. Turned slowly.
"I've heard. Where did you hear that name?"
Sua placed the photo on the table an old picture of a middle-aged man smiling at the camera, but with cold eyes.
"Found it in the archives. They wrote that he… raped women. Killed them. Dismembered them. Then disappeared. Car flipped over, body never found. But rumors still circulate."
Akira lifted her gaze from the folder. Her voice was even, but laced with bitterness.

"He wasn't just a maniac. He was a predator. Chose victims among prostitutes—the ones no one would look for. Humiliated them before death. Left… traces. Then vanished. As if he dissolved."
Takamura nodded, eyes still on the board.
"He was connected to some club. Unofficial. Something like a cult. People paid to get in. To watch. To participate. No one proved it. No one wanted to prove it."
Sua swallowed.
"And do you think… he's dead?"
Akira closed the folder.
"No one knows. But if he's alive… he's somewhere close. People like that don't just disappear."
Takamura turned to the window, looking down at the street where children from the kindergarten played on the playground.
"If he's alive he won't stop. People like that never stop."
In another place in a dimly lit club on the outskirts, where music played softly and the light was red and muted Takayama sat at a corner table. In front of him stood three girls young, made-up, in short dresses. He smiled calmly, almost fatherly. One of them, a blonde with trembling hands, tried to step back.
He reached out, touched her thigh slowly, possessively.
"Don't be afraid, darling. Everyone here is family."
Another girl a brunette with a tattoo on her collarbone snorted.
"Pervert."
Takayama only smiled wider.
"Pervert? No. Just a man who takes what he wants. And you… you want it too, don't you?"
The girls stayed silent. He laughed quietly.
"Good. Let's have some fun."
In a dark alley narrow, littered with trash, where streetlights barely glowed Asura and Renji stood. Asura leaned against the wall, arms crossed. Renji stood opposite, hands in his pockets, eyes on the ground.
He looked up.
"Want to go to grandma's? She baked pies. With cabbage and meat. Still hot."
Asura grimaced.
"To grandma's? Seriously? That's embarrassing, Renji. I'm not going to eat pies at your grandma's like some neighborhood girl."
Renji shrugged. He wasn't offended he simply didn't pay attention. Looked around at the dark walls, the trash bins.
"At least ten people were killed here. Over the last few years. No one found the killer. No one even tried."
Asura snorted.
"So what? You think I'm scared? I can handle myself. If someone comes at me I'll just slit his throat."
Renji looked at her calmly, without emotion.
"Maybe you would. But better not test it."
Asura pushed off the wall.

"Fine, hero. Go to your grandma with the pies. I'm going home. And don't even think about walking me I'm not a child."
She turned and walked away heels clicking on the asphalt, echoes bouncing off the walls. Renji remained alone. He looked toward the end of the alley where the streetlight barely reached. Then turned and walked the other way.

Chapter Seven 7 (The Seven Deadly Sins)

Renji kept walking along the path. The sun hung high and merciless, flooding everything with light without mercy. No shadow dared appear; the world was exposed, raw, like an open wound under a spotlight. The heat pressed on his shoulders, his neck, his eyelids, but he didn't slow his pace. His movements were steady, mechanical, as if his body moved on its own while his mind stayed somewhere far away.
A week ago.

The memory came suddenly, sharp and clear, like a knife sliding under the skin.
It was after classes. The corridors were already emptying. Renji walked slowly, bag over one shoulder, thinking about nothing in particular. Suddenly a girl appeared in front of him Ria.
She blocked his way, tilted her head.
"Come with us."
Renji stopped. Looked at her.
"With who 'us'?"
Ria laughed short, mocking.
"You'll see. Come on, don't be a coward. I want to show you something interesting."
She grabbed his sleeve, pulled lightly. Renji could have shaken her off. He didn't. Something in her tone made him follow curiosity, boredom, or just exhaustion. He went.
They reached the old wing of the school the one where the toilets were rarely used. The door creaked. Inside dim light from a small window, smell of bleach and damp tiles.
There stood Aya.
His Aya.
Almost naked. Shirt unbuttoned, skirt hiked up, underwear on the floor. Her skin looked pale under the fluorescent light, arms hanging limply at her sides. She didn't look at Renji. She looked at the tiles.
Next to her Ken. He stood close, too close. His hand was already on her waist.
Ria leaned against the doorframe, arms crossed.
"Watch," she whispered. "This is what happens when you're not looking."
Ken leaned in. Kissed Aya on the lips slowly at first, then deeper. His hands moved down her back, under the shirt, over her breasts. Aya didn't push him away. Didn't resist. Just stood there, eyes half-closed, breathing shallow.
Renji didn't move.
He sat down in the corner, back against the cold wall, knees pulled to his chest. A drop of sweat slowly slid down his forehead, then another, but he didn't wipe it. He just watched.
Ken pressed Aya against the sink. Her back arched. He entered her hard, without pause. Aya gasped, but the sound drowned. Ken moved faster. Hands gripped her hips. The sound of skin against skin echoed off the tiles. Aya's head fell back, hair sticking to her neck. She never once looked at Renji.
It lasted minutes. Or hours. Time lost meaning.
When it ended, Ken pulled out, zipped up, patted Aya on the cheek like she was a pet.
"Good girl."
He left. Ria followed, laughing softly as the door closed behind them.
Aya remained. She slid down the wall opposite Renji, knees to chest, arms wrapped around herself. She still didn't look at him.
Renji sat in silence for a long time. Sweat dried on his skin. The fluorescent light buzzed overhead.
Then Aya lifted her head. Eyes red, voice broken.
"Renji… I'm sorry. I'm really sorry."
He didn't answer. Just stared at the floor.
Then he stood up.
"That's it," he said quietly.

Aya flinched.
"Renji, please…"
He didn't turn around. Just walked past, opened the door, stepped into the corridor.
From that day on he hadn't said a word to her. Not a glance. Nothing.
Now, on the sun-drenched path, Renji kept walking. The memory no longer hurt. It simply sat inside him cold, heavy, eternal.
The sun kept shining.
It didn't forgive.
To be continued…

Chapter Seven 7 (The Last Day of Summer)

Renji sat in the empty classroom by the window. The final bell had rung twenty minutes earlier, and the school had emptied out like a discarded shell footsteps faded down the corridors, lockers slammed one by one, voices dissolved into the distance until only silence remained. He stayed behind. Elbows planted on the scratched wooden desk, chin resting on interlaced fingers. His school bag lay forgotten at his feet, zipper half-open, textbooks slightly spilling out, but he didn't care. He simply stared outside.

Beyond the glass a heavy, low sky the color of wet concrete. Clouds hung motionless, as if the wind had forgotten how to blow. Birds flew low sharp black silhouettes against the gray expanse. One flock passed very close to the window; through the glass he could almost hear the soft rush of their wings. They circled once, twice, then veered sharply and disappeared behind the row of apartment buildings across the street. Renji followed them with his eyes until the last black dot melted into the clouds.

He wasn't thinking about anything in particular. Thoughts simply didn't come. His mind was quiet too quiet. After that afternoon in the bathroom, something inside had been switched off. No anger burned, no sharp pain twisted in his chest. Just a vast, hollow space like a room where all the furniture had been removed and the lights turned off. The fluorescent lamp overhead buzzed steadily, the only sound in the classroom, indifferent and constant.

Outside, a single leaf detached from a tree and drifted down slowly. It spun in lazy spirals, caught a faint breeze, then landed on the wet pavement below. Renji watched it until it stopped moving. The sky darkened further. Rain was coming again. The air outside smelled faintly of damp earth and distant exhaust, seeping through the slightly open window frame.

The next day.

Kaoru's mother stood in the narrow hallway, zipping up her small travel bag. Beyond the window a warm day after the night's heavy rain. The air carried the sweet, clean scent of wet earth, grass, and leaves. Sunlight broke through the remaining clouds in bright shafts, making puddles on the sidewalk sparkle like scattered coins. Drops still fell from the eaves drip-drip-drip rhythmic, almost soothing.

Kaoru sat on the living room floor, knees drawn tight to her chest, arms wrapped around her legs. She rocked gently back and forth, staring at the Lego box in front of her bright primary colors, scattered pieces, a half-built castle from yesterday still standing crookedly.

"Mom… you're really going to the dacha?"

Her mother turned from the mirror where she was fixing her hair, smiled tiredly but warmly.

"Yes, sweetheart. Just for a couple of days. It's so peaceful there no noise, no neighbors, just birds and trees. I need to rest a little. You'll stay here with grandma she promised to bake your favorite apple pies."

Kaoru lowered her head until her forehead rested on her knees.

"I'll miss you. A lot. I'll cry every day."

Her mother set the bag down, walked over, crouched beside her daughter. She stroked Kaoru's hair gently, tucking a loose strand behind her ear.

"Oh, my little one… don't say that. I'll be back before you even have time to miss me. We'll call every evening I'll tell you about the garden, about the rabbits that come to eat the carrots. You won't even notice I'm gone."

Kaoru sniffled, voice muffled against her knees.

"I will notice. I always do."
Her mother sighed softly, pulled Kaoru into a hug. The girl buried her face in her mother's shoulder, small hands clutching the fabric of her coat.
"While I'm away, play with your Lego. Build something big and beautiful a castle, a spaceship, whatever you want. When I come back, I'll bring you a new set. The one with the pink flowers you wanted. Deal?"
Kaoru nodded against her mother's shoulder, tears soaking into the coat.
"Deal…"
Her mother kissed the top of her head, held her a moment longer, then stood up.
"Be good for grandma. Eat properly, don't stay up too late watching cartoons. I love you more than anything in the world."
"I love you too…"
The door closed with a soft click. The apartment suddenly felt bigger, emptier. Kaoru remained on the floor, staring at the Lego box. She reached out slowly, picked up a red brick, turned it over in her fingers. But she didn't start building. She just held it, listening to the drip-drip of water from the gutter outside. A warm breeze moved the curtain, letting in a shaft of sunlight that fell across the floor like a golden path. Kaoru didn't move toward it. She sat still, the brick warm in her hand, the apartment quiet except for the occasional distant car and the soft patter of remaining drops.
At the same time, Sua stood by an old vending machine on a quiet street corner, not far from the metro exit. The machine was ancient faded stickers, scratched glass, lights flickering weakly. It hummed steadily, offering cola, green tea, coffee in cans. Around it empty sidewalk, only the wind chasing a few dry leaves and crumpled wrappers across the pavement.
Sua circled the machine slowly, as if waiting his turn. Hands in his jacket pockets. His gaze slid over cracks, the back panel, the ground beneath it. He knew this spot. Takayama's people used it. Not for big deals, not for weapons or cash. For small stashes packets, vials, tiny bottles of something that could disappear into a pocket in seconds.
He bent down as if tying his shoelace. Fingers slid along the bottom edge of the machine, feeling for irregularities. Found it a small metal plate taped on with duct tape. He peeled it carefully. Inside a plastic bottle, the kind that once held soda, now cut down and resealed.
Sua pulled it out. Held it up to the light.
Empty.
Not a trace. Not even residue on the sides. Only a faint chemical smell sharp, artificial, already fading into nothing.
He clenched the bottle in his fist until the plastic cracked.
"They already used it…" he whispered to himself.
The machine hummed again, its screen flashing "Insert coins." Sua didn't insert anything. He straightened up, slipped the empty bottle into his pocket, and walked away slowly, without looking back.
Birds flew overhead, low and black against the gray sky. The sun tried to break through the clouds but couldn't quite manage it.

The Beginning Of The End

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Chapter Eight 8 (Retribution)

1972 year. Japan. Island of Retribution.
Evening fell on the island softly but inevitably. The sun had already slipped below the horizon, leaving the sky in deep shades of purple and dark blue. Stars had not yet fully ignited, but the moon hung low, large and pale, as if cut from old paper. On a small beach by the water's edge, a campfire burned small but greedy, devouring dry branches with crackles and bursts of sparks. Four young men sat around it on spread-out jackets and old blankets. They were in their early twenties smooth faces, eyes shining from the fire and youth. Takayama sat closest to the flames, knees pulled to his chest, arms wrapped around them. Beside him his three friends. One of them the guy with the guitar on his lap quietly strummed the strings. The melody was simple, a little melancholic, but beautiful. He sang in a low voice, almost a whisper:
"What a beautiful sky…
What a beautiful sky tonight…
Look, the stars are falling,
And we still stand…"
His voice trembled slightly from the cold, from emotion, from the evening being too quiet. Another guy thin, with long fingers opened a can of peaches in syrup. The metal scraped. He scooped out a piece with a spoon, brought it to his lips, licked the syrup.
"Sweet," he said simply and passed the can to the others.
The third the biggest of them threaded marshmallows onto a long stick and held it over the fire. The white puffs slowly turned golden, bubbled, began dripping sweet goo onto the coals. The smell of burnt sugar mixed with smoke and sea salt.
Takayama stayed silent the longest. He stared into the flames as if he saw something the others couldn't. Then suddenly he stood up.
"I'll go get more firewood," he said quietly. "Ten minutes. I'll be right back."
His friends nodded without looking away from the fire. The guitar kept playing. The marshmallows hissed. Takayama picked up the flashlight an old, heavy one with a metal body and walked toward the forest.
The path disappeared under his feet almost immediately. The flashlight beam carved out pine trunks, moss, fallen needles from the darkness. The air grew colder, thicker, smelling of pine and wet earth. His footsteps sounded dull. Takayama walked confidently he knew the island, knew these trails.
And then he stopped.
The flashlight beam hit something red and torn.
On the ground lay a security guard one of those who watched over the vacation cabins. His uniform was ripped open, chest torn apart, face… almost no face left. Blood had spread black in the flashlight's light. And above the corpse stood a wolf.
Alone. Large. Fur wet with blood, eyes yellow and burning. It didn't growl. It just ate. Slowly, methodically, tearing off chunks of flesh and swallowing. Fangs glinted. The crunch of bones was sharp, like branches snapping in the campfire.
Takayama didn't move.

He stood frozen, flashlight trembling in his hand, but the beam never left the wolf. The wolf ate. Instinct devoured everything flesh, clothing, fear, morality. No philosophy. No words. Only hunger and teeth.
Takayama watched. For a long time. His lips moved.
“Fucking hell… holy shit…”
The voice came out hoarse, almost a whisper, but it carried everything shock, horror, a strange awe. The wolf continued eating. Instinct overpowered philosophy. Overpowered morality. Overpowered reason. Takayama watched until the wolf was full and slipped back into the darkness, leaving behind only gnawed bones and the smell of iron.
The next morning, only one person stood on the shore Takayama.
The rescue boat approached slowly, engine rumbling low. Two men in uniform jumped onto the wet sand.
“Where are the others?” one of them asked, squinting against the sun.
Takayama looked at the water. His voice was even, empty.
“They left on business. Said they’d be back soon.”
The rescuers exchanged glances. One nodded to the other.
“Alright. Get on. There’s no one else here.”
Takayama stepped onto the boat. The engine roared. The shore began to recede slowly, as if the island didn’t want to let go.
He stood at the stern, looking back. The Island of Retribution grew smaller, turning into a dark spot on the horizon. Takayama understood one thing simple, final.
Instincts are always above morality.
No matter how much we wave them away.
No matter how much we pretend.
They always win.
The boat disappeared into the open sea.

Chapter Eight 8 (Impression)

Takayama sat on the hard chair in a small police station on another island a tiny town with low houses, narrow streets, and the constant smell of salt and seaweed. The room was cramped, lit by a single bare bulb hanging from the ceiling. The walls were yellowed with age, covered in old missing-boat notices and faded photographs. A fan spun lazily overhead, stirring the humid air but bringing no relief only shifting papers on the desk.

The officer a man in his forties with bags under his eyes and a cigarette perpetually dangling from the corner of his mouth leaned on the desk, looking down at Takayama.

“So… one more time,” he said in a low, patient voice that had already lost interest. “How did you leave them behind?”

Takayama stared at the floor. His hands rested on his knees, fingers clenched so tightly the knuckles turned white.

“I went for firewood,” he answered quietly, almost without tone. “Said ten minutes. Saw… that. The guard. The wolf. I was too scared. Froze. Couldn’t move.”

The officer exhaled smoke, watched it rise slowly toward the ceiling and dissolve near the bulb.

“Scared, huh. And the others?”

Takayama didn’t answer right away. Inside his head, another voice spoke his own, cold and clear.

I didn’t run. I just watched. Stood there and watched the whole thing.

The door opened. Two other officers stepped in uniforms damp from the sea air, faces tired.

“We searched the whole area,” one said, wiping sweat from his forehead with his sleeve. “No tents. No boat. No campfire. Just dark ash and scattered stones. Nothing else.”

The first officer turned to Takayama.

“So they left on their own. Didn’t tell you. Probably already home by now.”

Takayama nodded slowly. The officer shrugged.

“You can go. But if you remember anything… you know where to find us.”

Takayama stood up. Walked out into the evening air. The island felt smaller, quieter. He looked at the sea calm, dark, reflecting the first stars. In his head the wolf’s yellow eyes still burned. And he carried away for the rest of his life only that moment the one he remembered more clearly than anything else.

Many years later.

First day.

Renji lay on his bed in his room. The window was open; the curtain moved slightly in the breeze. Outside the usual city noise: cars, distant voices, train horns. But inside silence. He lay on his back, arms at his sides, eyes open and fixed on the ceiling. A small crack ran across it, one he noticed every day but never thought about seriously.

He wasn’t sleeping. Just lying there. Breathing even, but his chest rose heavily, as if the air had grown thick. Memories of the previous day of Aya, of Ken, of how he watched and did nothing circled slowly in his head like muddy water in a puddle. He wasn’t angry. He didn’t cry. Just lay there, waiting for the emptiness to either pass or grow heavier.

Second day. A new day at school.

Morning was bright, almost blinding the sun stood high, sky clear, not a single cloud. The school courtyard buzzed with its usual noise: someone shouting in tag, someone sitting on benches,

someone standing by the gates chatting on the phone. The air smelled of dust, hot asphalt, and freshly cut grass from the lawn near the entrance.
Renji lay on the ground in the middle of the courtyard on his back, arms spread wide, eyes half-closed. Dust settled on his school shirt, in his hair, on his face a thin gray layer like ash. On his cheek a fresh bruise, lip split, a thin trickle of blood still seeping from the corner of his mouth. He had been beaten. Not brutally, but enough to leave marks. The girls those same three, a year or two older, from the graduating classes had done it quickly, without extra words. They simply approached, surrounded him, hit a few times fists, feet, knees. He didn't resist. Didn't scream. Just fell. And they walked away laughing.
Now he lay in the dust. Alone.
Around him a small circle of silence gradually formed. Students walked around him, casting quick glances, whispering, but no one approached. No one asked "are you okay?" They just stepped aside, like stepping around a puddle or a stone on the road.
Then they appeared again.
The same three girls. They walked slowly, confidently, as if the courtyard belonged only to them. One in a short skirt, the second with a cigarette between her fingers, the third with a phone in her hand but the screen was off; she wasn't filming, just holding it like a weapon.
They stopped over him. Their shadows fell across his face, briefly blocking the sun.
The first crouched down. Long nails painted black touched his cheek not gently, but testing, as if checking an item on a shelf.
"Puppy," she said quietly, almost tenderly. "Look at him lying there. In the dust, like trash."
The second laughed short, sharp.
"We'd rape you with pleasure. Right here, in front of everyone. You wouldn't even fight back. Too weak."
The third leaned closer, hair falling forward, covering half his face.
"Pathetic sight. Lying there like a rag. Gonna get up? Or do you like it when people stand over you?"
Renji didn't answer. Didn't move. Just looked up through them, through their shadows, into the sky. The sun hit his eyes again. Tears ran down his temples, mixed with dust and blood on his cheeks, leaving dirty streaks.
The girls lingered for another moment. The first straightened up, brushed off her skirt.
"Fine. Let him lie. No one's gonna come anyway."
They turned and walked away steps confident, heels clicking on the asphalt. Whispers behind them faded. The courtyard buzzed back to its usual noise.
Renji remained lying there.
Dust kept settling.
The sun kept shining.
He didn't care.
Meanwhile in prison.
Renji's father fought in a dark corner of the yard. His opponent a tall, scarred maniac with wild eyes swung a fist. The father dodged, struck hard. The punch landed clean on the jaw. A sickening crack. Blood sprayed across concrete. The maniac staggered, teeth red. The father hit again. And again. Bone gave way. The man collapsed. Blood pooled under his head.

Renji's father stood over him, breathing hard, knuckles split, blood running down his fingers. Eyes empty no satisfaction, no rage. Just exhaustion.
In another place an underground fight club.
A man and a girl fought in the center of the ring. No gloves, no rules. She was smaller but faster dodged, struck low, split his lip. He roared, charged. She sidestepped, kicked his knee. He fell. The crowd roared louder.
Miyuki sat alone on the side. Cracking sunflower seeds with her teeth click-click-click spitting shells onto the floor.
"Another one broke," she muttered quietly.
She smiled thinly, cracked another seed.
"They always break."

Chapter Nine 9 (The Flower Garden)

The sun's rays fell right on the window. Kaoru sat on the icy bathroom tiles, hugging her knees so tightly it was as though she were trying to hold something alive inside her something that had died long ago. Water still dripped from the ends of her hair heavy, infrequent drops shattering against the floor, forming tiny trembling puddles around her bare feet. The soaked t-shirt clung to her skin, cold and alien, while her underwear was drenched through, making her flesh prickle with goosebumps. Her chin rested on her knees, eyes staring into nothingness past the fogged mirror, past the white tiles, into a place where reality simply ended.

The memory arrived without knocking, as it always did.
She was sixteen.
A dead-silent night. An abandoned garden on the outskirts of the city. Three men stood around a freshly dug pit. Shovels in hand, black wet earth falling in clumps. Laughter low, hoarse, laced with animal satisfaction.
“Hurry up before the moon sets,” one muttered, wiping sweat from his brow with a sleeve.
“What’s the rush? No one’s gonna find it,” the second snorted, spitting into the darkness of the hole.
The third said nothing just threw a black plastic bundle into the pit. It landed with a dull, heavy thud. Laughter flared again short, jittery, pleased.
They climbed into the car. The engine roared to life, headlights slicing through the dark. Music from the speakers drowned out the hiss of tires, and they kept chuckling, as if they’d just pulled off a clever prank.
Kaoru stood off to the side. The pistol in her hand felt like an extension of her arm. Her face was blank dead. She slowly raised the barrel.
One shot.
Blood sprayed from the driver’s neck, flooding the windshield in a scarlet curtain. The car jerked, swerved, slammed into a tree with a screech of tortured metal. It flipped. Gasoline poured out in black streams. Flames erupted greedy, instant, unstoppable.
She stood at the heart of the fire. Heat licked her legs, scorched her skin, but Kaoru did not move. One of them the backseat passenger crawled out through the shattered window. He was burning alive. Skin bubbled and blackened, hair ignited like a torch. He crawled, gasping, leaving a smoking trail behind him.
“Jesus Christ…” he rasped, reaching out with a charred hand.
Kaoru stepped closer. Raised the pistol. One more shot. His head snapped back like a broken puppet. The body slumped into the flames.
She waited until the fire began truly devouring her own skin. Only then did she turn and walk slowly into the darkness, leaving behind the crackle of burning metal and the stench of roasted flesh.
The memory faded. Only the silence of the bathroom remained, and the slow drip of water from her hair.
Kaoru rose gradually. Water traced cold paths down her thighs. In the mirror she saw empty eyes and a wet face no tears. Just water. Always just water.
Morning arrived too bright, too merciless. Sunlight poured through the windows, erasing every shadow. Genzo stretched with a crack of his neck, glanced at his phone 7:12. First day at the new school.
Cold tap water snapped him awake. In the mirror an ordinary face, ordinary dark circles that had become part of him. He washed, dried off, pulled on the new uniform still smelling of the store and someone else’s expectations. Popped flavorless gum into his mouth and stared at his phone screen.
Meanwhile, at the school gates, Aya ran up to her friend, beaming, holding out a palm full of candies.
“Mika-san, here!”
Mika took one, carefully unwrapped it, slipped it into her mouth.

“Thanks, Aya. You’re always so… kind.”
Aya’s smile grew even wider.
A calm voice with a faint teasing edge came from behind:
“Ladies, enjoy your meal.”
They turned. A tall boy in school uniform stood a few steps away tie loosened, smile easy and unforced. Aya smiled back brightly; Mika gave a small, slightly wary nod.
Genzo walked down the school corridor, eyes glued to his phone. Noise, smells, faces everything foreign, pressing in. Without looking, he bumped someone’s shoulder.
A phone flew from the other boy’s hand and struck the floor. The screen spiderwebbed with cracks.
Genzo froze. Looked up.
Renji froze too. He glanced down at the broken phone, then at Genzo. Real, unguarded surprise flickered in his eyes.
Genzo crouched first.
“Sorry… I didn’t mean to. Really sorry.”
Renji stared for a second two. Then he bent down himself, picked up the phone. The screen flickered but still worked.
“It’s fine,” he said quietly, without anger. “Happens.”
He turned and walked away down the corridor. Genzo remained standing, watching him go, an odd emptiness settling in his chest.
Sunset poured over the city in thick orange syrup. At the old vending machine on the corner of Sakura Street, two guys had cornered an elderly woman. She trembled, clutching her wallet with thin fingers.
“Come on, granny, don’t be stingy,” one grinned. “You don’t have long left anyway what do you need money for?”
Her lips quivered. She said nothing.
The second stepped closer, already menacing.
“Faster, old hag.”
Raiden was passing by. He stopped. Looked.
“Extorting money from old people isn’t right.”
They turned.
“And who the hell are you? What do you want, sweetheart?”
Raiden gave a small, almost lazy smile.
One swung at him. Raiden didn’t rush. He stepped aside, caught the arm, twisted it with a dry snap. A short, precise strike to the left ribs. The thug doubled over and dropped to his knees, gasping.
The second charged furious, wild. Raiden met him with a straight kick to the solar plexus. The guy flew backward, crashed into the vending machine, and slid down the metal.
Raiden exhaled evenly. He approached the woman, pulled several of his own bills from his pocket, and gently placed them in her palm.
“I’m sorry,” he said softly. “That shouldn’t have happened.”
Then he dialed.
“Hello. There are two men extorting money from an elderly woman at the vending machine on the corner of Sakura Street. Please send someone.”

He pocketed the phone. Gave the groaning pair on the ground a brief glance. Turned and walked away.
The woman stood watching him go. Wallet and money in her hands. Her voice trembled: “Thank you…”
Raiden didn’t look back. He simply kept walking until he disappeared around the corner.

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Chapter Nine 9 (Fog)

Miyuki rose slowly from her spot, as if her body was still reluctant to let go of the fight's tension. The underground club air hung thick a heavy blend of sweat, cigarette smoke, and the faint metallic sweetness of blood that always lingered after a good match. The ring stood empty now: someone dragged the mats away, someone else wiped the floor with a rag, leaving dark streaks. The crowd had mostly thinned out only the most stubborn lingered, the kind who stayed until the music cut off completely.

She stretched, vertebrae popping one by one. Shoulders rolled back, spine arched, then relaxed. Her bag black, worn, with peeling letters "FIGHT" rested against the wall. Miyuki bent down, picked it up, slung the strap over her shoulder. She didn't glance back at the guy still sitting on the floor, pressing a hand to his split lip and trying to catch his breath. She simply walked toward the exit.

Footsteps echoed loudly on the concrete. The upper door creaked open. Outside fog. Thick, cold, smelling of river water and wet asphalt. It wrapped around her face, hair, clothes instantly. Miyuki stepped forward and dissolved into the white haze, as if she had never existed.

A car moved down the highway in dense fog. Headlights burned yellow cones, cutting through the white veil, but visibility ended ten meters ahead. Inside the cabin, an old Japanese ballad played quietly on the radio the singer's voice trembled with longing, words barely distinguishable through the hiss of tires on wet asphalt. Genzō's parents sat in silence. His mother stared out the window where nothing could be seen. His father gripped the wheel with both hands, knuckles slightly pale from tension. No one spoke. Only the music and the breathing of three people filled the tight space.

Takayama sat alone in his small study on the second floor of an old house. The desk lamp cast a round pool of light over scattered photographs. Some showed people in cages, faces bruised and bloodied; others bound bodies, needles in veins, burned skin. He flipped through the images slowly, fingers barely trembling. He looked at each one for a long time, as though searching for something long lost. Then he reached for the old rotary phone in the corner of the desk. Dialed a number he knew by heart. It rang twice.

A voice answered low, calm, familiar.

"Yeah?"

"Tomorrow," Takayama said quietly, voice steady. "Bring a couple of packs. The usual."

A short pause.

"Got it," the voice replied. "Will do."

The line went dead. Takayama set the receiver down carefully, as if it might break. He stared at the photographs a moment longer, then turned off the lamp. Darkness swallowed the room.

Genzō lay on the sofa in just his underwear. The room was small, crammed with unpacked moving boxes still smelling of cardboard and old dust. Light from the desk lamp fell across the phone in his hand. He chewed gum slowly, mechanically; bubbles inflated and popped with soft snaps. On the screen memes, short videos, stories from old friends in Osaka. He scrolled without interest, eyes unfocused.

"New school tomorrow," he muttered aloud, voice sleepy and tired. "Everything from scratch again. New faces. New rules. New people who'll look at me the same way they did at the old one."

He rolled onto his side. The phone slipped onto the pillow. His gaze drifted to the wall. Among game posters, old stickers, random marker doodles, and scraps of tape hung one single sheet tattered, written in thick black marker:
Hey, newbie!
Still that same pimply loser who can't even get out of bed?
Then come to us!!!
We'll show you what real life looks like.
Abandoned warehouse behind the old factory. 23:00.
Genzō froze. His heart gave one hard thump. He read it again. Then a third time. A crooked, nervous smile tugged at his lips half excitement, half fear.
"…Okay then," he whispered, staring at the small phone number scribbled at the bottom.
He took a photo of the flyer. Set the phone on his chest. The gum had lost its flavor. He spat it into his palm and tossed it aside. Lay on his back. Stared at the ceiling. The same small crack he noticed every day now looked slightly longer.
Meanwhile, Takumi, Ria, and Ken stood in a dark corner of the school courtyard. In front of them stood another boy thin, nervous, hands trembling. They had forced him to fight Renji.
"Come on," Takumi said softly, smiling. "Just hit him. We'll watch."
The boy stepped forward. Renji stood opposite arms at his sides, eyes on the ground. The punch came suddenly. Renji dodged, countered sharply. Fist connected with jaw. A crack. A tooth flew out, blood sprayed onto the asphalt. The boy collapsed, clutching his face.
Renji stood there, breathing hard. Barely holding himself upright legs shaking, head ringing.
Takumi, Ria, and Ken watched. Smirking.
"Rooster in the henhouse," Takumi said quietly.
Ria snorted.
"Pathetic. Doesn't even fight back properly."
Ken spat on the ground.
"Shame. Thought there'd be more blood."
They turned and left. Renji remained standing alone. Blood dripped from his lip onto the asphalt. He didn't wipe it. Just stood and watched the shadows lengthen under the sun.

Chapter Ten 10 (The Beginning Of The End)

Genzo pushed the heavy school door open with his shoulder. His palms still smelled of old paper and dust he'd spent the whole day hauling yellowed book boxes for the librarian. His head throbbed, his throat scratched, his forehead was slick with a greasy film of sweat and street grime. The cold had already settled in his chest, but he ignored it the way he ignored almost everything that didn't fit into "survive today."

Home smelled of lemon cleaner and slightly scorched rice.

Mom stood in the hallway, arms crossed, talking to a stranger in a black maid dress. The dress was too new, too pristine for this house. The buttons gleamed like tiny black beetles.

"…three times a week, four hours each. Laundry, cleaning, kitchen. Cash in an envelope. No taxes. That work for you?"

The maid nodded once, eyes down.

Mom smirked at the corner of her mouth.

"Then start tomorrow. You can go for today."

Genzo silently took off his shoes. His heels burned. He walked past them, trying not to cough.

Mom didn't even turn.

In his room he froze.

A girl stood on his bed.

Back to him, long black hair in a messy ponytail, wearing that same black maid dress. She was snapping the sheet taut the fabric cracked like dead bird wings. The mattress dipped under her knee.

Blood drained from Genzo's face.

"Mom…" His voice cracked. He spun toward the kitchen. "I told you how many times do I have to say it? No strangers in my room!"

From the hallway came Mom's low, almost fond chuckle.

"Oh, you've gotten so delicate. It's just cleaning, Genzo. She's almost done."

The girl didn't turn. Only her shoulders twitched slightly. The sheet settled perfectly, like a shroud.

Genzo clenched his fists until the knuckles whitened.

"Another day begins," he thought mechanically, and closed his eyes.

Morning arrived gray and sticky.

Genzo woke coughing. A thick plug of phlegm sat in his throat. He spat into his palm yellow-green. Wiped it on the hem of his T-shirt. Stood. Yawned until his jaw cracked. Walked to the window.

Fog hung thick; the school buildings were only faint shapes beyond the glass.

He pulled on his uniform. The shirt was already stale, collar yellowed at the neck. Tie knotted crooked whatever.

Today he was being moved to Class A.

The teacher entered last. Tired eyes, lips thin as a blade.

"So…" She glanced at the register. "Takeda Genzo. Take the first desk. It's empty."

Genzo walked between the rows under staring eyes. Sat. Someone behind him gave a quiet snort.

The teacher continued:

"Tomorrow we'll have a new student joining us. Kaoru. Please be kind to her, alright?"

Her smile was crooked, like an old scar.
Lessons dragged like pus. Genzo doodled meaningless loops in his notebook. He swallowed coughs with his fist.
When the final bell rang he stood near the back.
In the corridor someone bumped his shoulder again.
Renji.
The same guy whose phone cracked on the concrete yesterday. Genzo had apologized for minutes, almost bowing. Renji had just waved it off.
Today almost the same scene.
"Sorry…" Genzo started first. "Is the phone okay?"
Renji looked down at him. Something flickered in his eyes exhaustion mixed with faint curiosity.
"It's fine. I'm used to it."
Genzo held out his hand. Renji hesitated a second, then shook palm dry, hot.
Then Genzo without knowing why lifted Renji's hand and pressed a quick, feather-light kiss to the knuckles.
Renji froze. Color slowly climbed his cheeks. He laughed crooked, nervous.
"You're weird."
"Genzo."
"Renji."
They stood another heartbeat. Then Genzo spun and half-ran down the hall. His heart hammered in his throat.
He was late.
The underground hall was beneath an abandoned warehouse three blocks from school. Rusty iron door, then concrete stairs down. Smell of sweat, metal, blood, cheap liquor.
Crowds already inside. Some smoked in corners, some wrapped their fists in tape. Light came from dying fluorescent tubes half burned out.
A tall girl with a buzz cut and fighter's shoulders stepped toward him. Black sleeveless tank, thick veins snaking over her biceps.
"Miyuki. Weight, height."
"One seventy-five… sixty-seven kilos."
She snorted.
Without warning she shoved two fingers deep into his mouth down to the root of his tongue.
Genzo jerked. Her fingers tasted of tobacco and rust.
"Teeth intact. Throat not trashed." She pulled them out, wiped them on his shirt. "This one's in."
Genzo coughed, spat on the concrete. Her taste lingered.
Meanwhile, behind the school grounds, near the old concrete blocks, the air was thick with dust and fear.
Takumi gripped a scrawny first-year by the hair. The boy no longer screamed just trembled and wheezed. Blood from his split lip dripped onto the asphalt, mixing with dirt into black-red puddles.
Kaoru stood slightly apart.
Wind tugged at her long hair. She stared down at the cracked asphalt, as though something far more interesting waited in the fissures.
A fat gray rat darted past, naked pink tail whipping.

Kaoru crushed it under her heel.
A wet, loud crunch. The spine snapped instantly. Hind legs twitched once, twice, then stilled.
Takumi laughed out loud.
Kaoru bent, lifted the rat by the tail. The body swung like a pendulum; blood dripped from the crushed skull.
She turned to the boy. Eyes calm, almost tender.
"Eat it."
The boy shook violently. Tears streamed, mixing with snot and blood.
"P-please… no…"
Kaoru leaned closer. Voice soft, almost a lullaby.
"This isn't a request. This is the first truth.
The world is only eaters and eaten.
Right now you choose your category.
Swallow or I start pulling your fingernails out one by one until you chew your own fingers to the bone."
Ria, standing farther back, swallowed hard.
"Kaoru… maybe that's enough…"
Kaoru didn't even glance at her. Only her lips twitched.
"One more word, Ria, and your tongue is next.
You want to know what it feels like when someone rips it out so you finally shut up?"
Ria stepped back. Shut up.
Shinnya muttered under his breath:
"You're all fucking insane…"
Kaoru slowly turned her head toward him. Smiled wide, until it hurt her jaw.
"Maybe.
Or maybe I'm the only one who stopped lying.
Everyone pretends morals, rules, mercy.
But strip it all away and there's only one law left: whoever is strongest decides what is right.
I'm not cruel. I'm honest.
I just removed the makeup.
And soon this whole city will understand what real hierarchy looks like."
The boy had stopped fighting.
Trembling hands took the rat. Opened his mouth. Teeth chattered.
He forced it down fur, blood, grit, tiny bone shards cracking between molars. He vomited instantly, right there on the asphalt. Bile mixed with rat blood in a steaming puddle.
Kaoru laughed low, throaty, almost loving.
She crouched in front of him.
Stroked his hair like a dog's.
"Good boy.
See? Already lighter.
You accepted what you are."
Then she stood. Sat on the edge of a concrete block. Legs dangling. Wind blew under her skirt she didn't care.

Suddenly she spread her arms and pulled Takumi and Shinnya into a crushing embrace hard enough to make ribs creak. They flinched but didn't dare pull away.
She pressed them close, lips brushing Takumi's ear.
"I will create it," she whispered. "The real beginning. Of the end.
Not for revenge. Not for pleasure.
For clarity.
So everyone finally sees: there is no good, no evil. Only power.
And I will become the power that no longer hides behind smiles and apologies.
No bully. No savior. No god.
No one.
Ever.
Will stand above me."
Ria stood apart, hugging herself. Teeth chattering.
She whispered, barely audible:
"What the hell is her plan…"
Evening wind carried the smell of crushed rat, vomit, and blood toward the city.
And the city stayed silent.

The Beginning Of The End

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